

Computer Games

The term "computer games" encompasses a broad range of computer programs ranging from fast-moving shoot-em'-ups on alien worlds to enormously sophisticated business and military simulations. Even most hand-held and stand-alone video games designed to be played with a television set incorporate a microprocessor and thus can be considered computer games.

Computers weren't invented to play games. In fact, in the 50's and 60's, with computer time both scarce and expensive, writing games for the fun of it was actively discouraged at most computer centers.

Nevertheless, there were many other reasons than just plain fun for writing computer games. Common reasons included exploring the power of the computer, improving understanding of human thought processes, producing educational tools for managers or military officers, simulating dangerous environments, and providing the means for discovery learning.

Let us consider some of the landmarks in the field of computer games. In some sense, it all started in 1950 when Alan Turing proposed his famous imitation game in the article, "Computing Machinery and Intelligence" published in Mind magazine. Never programmed by Turing himself, some 13 years later, a variation of Turing's "game" was put in the form of a computer program, Eliza, by Joseph Weizenbaum at MIT.

In 1952, behind a cloak of secrecy, the first military simulation games were programmed by Bob Chapman and others at Rand Air Defense Lab, Santa Monica, CA. In the same year, a number of "formula" games (Nim, etc.) and "dictionary lookup"

games (Tic-Tac-Toe, etc.) were programmed for several early computers. Also in 1952, a computer was specially designed to play Hex, a game with no exact solution, by E.F. Moore and Claude Shannon at Bell Labs, NJ.

In 1953, Arthur Samuel first demonstrated his Checkers program on the newly unveiled IBM 701 computer at IBM Corp. in Poughkeepsie, NY. Later that year, the book, "The Complete Strategyst" by J.D. Williams was published by RAND Corp. This was the first primer on Game Theory and provided the theoretical foundation for many early computer game programs.

The first computer game of blackjack was programmed in 1954 for the IBM 701 at the Atomic Energy Lab at Los Alamos, NM. Also in 1954, a crude game of pool--perhaps the first non-military game to use a video display--was programmed at the Univ. of Michigan.

In the area of simulation games, the military set the pace for many years and in 1955 Hutspeil, the first theater-level war game (NATO vs USSR), was programmed at the Research Analysis Corp. in McLean, VA.

Although Newell, Shaw, and Simon are frequently credited with the first chess game--probably because they stayed at it for over 20 years--the first computer version of chess was actually programmed in 1956 by Kister, Stein, Ulam, Walden, and Wells on the MANIAC-I at the Los Alamos Atomic Energy Lab. The game played on a simplified 6 x 6 board and examined all possible moves two levels deep at the rate of 12 moves per minute. It played similar to a human player with about 20 games experience. In contrast, Deep Thought, the reigning computer chess champion

in 1990 examines about 1.5 million moves per second and uses a combination of brute force and intuitive play on a standard board. Although rated at about 2500 on the FIDE system, which places it among the top 30 human players in the world, Deep Thought was decisively defeated by Gary Kasparov in a two-game match in October 1989.

In the mid-50's, it may have seemed like the AEC was sponsoring computer game research because in addition to blackjack and chess at Los Alamos, in 1958 a tennis game was designed for an analog computer at Brookhaven Nat'l Lab by Willy Higinbotham. This game, played on an oscilloscope display, was significant in that it was the first video game to permit two players to actually control the direction and motion of the object moving on the screen (the ball).

In 1959, large-scale simulation games moved into the private sector with the programming of "The Management Game" by Cohen, Cyert, Dill and others at Carnegie Tech, Pittsburgh, PA. This game, programmed in the language GATE on a Bendix G-15 computer, simulated competition between three companies in the detergent industry and integrated modules on marketing, production, finance, and research. Modified and updated for newer computers, but still in use at many graduate schools of business today, this game has certainly set the record for the longest life of any computer game ever written.

With the delivery in 1959 of the first Digital Equipment PDP-1 with its 15" video display, the continuing evolution from text-only games to video games was hastened. Written by Slug Russel, Shag Gratz, and Alan Kotok, the first game for the PDP-1

was Spacewar, first demonstrated at an MIT open house in 1962.

Later in 1962, Omar K. Moore at Yale built a device called "The Talking Typewriter" for teaching reading to young children. In the device, built by Edison Electric, a computer controlled a video display, slide projector, and audio recorder. In 1964, a more general-purpose computer assisted instruction (CAI) system using IBM hardware including a CRT with graphics, light pen, and audio was developed by Patrick Suppes at Stanford.

Military research was still forging ahead and in 1964 Bunker-Ramo demonstrated a CRT display which simultaneously combined computer data with a projected background.

Artists began to get into the picture in 1964 when A. Michael Noll at Bell Labs produced the first computer art on a CRT display. Many years later, spurred by such companies as Activision, Lucasfilm Games and Cinemaware, artists began to play a much larger role in the creation of computer games.

Rounding out the landmark year of 1964, the language Basic was developed by John Kemeny and Tom Kurtz on the GE 225 timesharing system at Dartmouth College. Within a few months, the first interactive educational games and simulations began to appear on the Dartmouth system.

Various types of graphics displays from many manufacturers were introduced in the mid-60's, opening the door to new video effects. Thus, we find a video pool game developed at RCA (1967), a ball-and-paddle game by Ralph Baer at Saunders Associates (1967, later to become the Magnavox Odyssey home video game in 1972), a rocket car simulation by Judah Swartz at MIT (1968), a graphic flight simulation by Evans & Sutherland (1969),

a lunar lander game at DEC (1969), and a device to permit computer output and standard television video on the same display at Stanford (1968).

In the October 1970 issue of Scientific American, Martin Gardner devoted his mathematical games column to a description of John Conway's "Game of Life." Easily programmed, within weeks, it began to appear on virtually every video computer terminal in the country.

In the late 1960's, the National Science Foundation was attempting to encourage the use of computers in secondary schools to improve science education. One of the notable NSF-funded projects that produced scores of simulation games in science and social studies was the Huntington Computer Project directed by Ludwig Braun at Brooklyn Polytechnic Institute (later at SUNY, Stony Brook). In the Project's "Malaria" simulation game, for example, students must try to control an outbreak of malaria in a Central American country using a combination of various pesticides, inoculations, and treatment of the ill—all without bankrupting the country.

Also in the late 60's, both Digital Equipment Corp., and Hewlett-Packard started major marketing efforts to sell computers to secondary and elementary schools. As a result of this, both companies sponsored a number of small scale projects to write computer games and simulations in various fields, many of which were released in the early 1970's. In DEC's "King" game, for example, players decide how much land to buy, sell, and cultivate each year, how much to feed the people, while dealing with problems of industrial development, pollution, and tourism.

Meanwhile, on the recreational front, in 1971, Nolan Bushnell rewrote Spacewar as a coin-op game called Computer Space which was marketed by Nutting Associates. Too complicated for the average player, only 1500 units were sold and the game was not successful. A year later, Bushnell's next project, the Pong coin-op game, was considerably more successful and was the foundation of Atari Corp.

Also in 1972, Willy Crother and Don Woods wrote a game for the DEC PDP-10 which they simply called "Adventure." The game, the first in the interactive role-playing fantasy genre, was unbelievably addictive and players consumed vast gobs of timesharing computer time on whatever system had it loaded.

1972 also saw the first issue of Bob Albrecht's People's Computer Company newsletter which, along with material for teachers and students, included many small Basic games each issue. A year later DEC published the book, "101 Basic Computer Games" by David Ahl, which, in 1978, became the first computer book of any kind to sell 1 million copies.

Ahl left DEC in 1974 and started Creative Computing, the first personal computing magazine and the first magazine to publish three or four major games every issue. Also in '74, Ted Nelson published the book "Computer Lib/Dream Machines" while, at the MITS company in Albuquerque, NM, Ed Roberts was putting the final touches on the first mass produced personal computer kit, the Altair 8800.

With the widespread availability of affordable video game systems and personal computers, it looked as though there was no top to the computer and video games market. Atari introduced the

home version of Pong in 1975 and it was followed a year later by literally hundreds of imitators. Removable cartridge home games were first introduced by Fairchild in 1976, followed by Bally, Atari, and others a year later. By 1982, over 100 companies had entered the market with game systems or cartridges.

Also by 1982, the \$6 billion in quarters put into coin-op games exceeded the gross take of all professional sports combined, buoyed by such games as Space Invaders (1978), Pac-Man (1980), Defender (1981) and scores of other mega-hits.

The kit era of personal computers lasted only two years and by 1977 manufacturers of self-contained, assembled computers like Commodore, Apple, and Radio Shack took the market by storm. This opened the computer game floodgates as the cost of entry was so low. All one needed was a personal computer, some programming smarts, and a few hundred bucks to buy some magazine ads. In more than one case, bright teenage programmers started game companies and hired their parents as employees.

However, all was not well in gameland and in 1983 the bubble burst. Many factors are responsible for the crash: too many me-too games, scores of companies with no management or financial expertise, jaded game players, public backlash against sleazy arcades, and just too much expansion too fast.

After a disasterous two-year downward spiral, it looked to many like computer games were in the grave. In April 1985, the Frost & Sullivan market research firm rated computer and video games as having the least potential of 24 high technology markets. The video and home computer games market was judged to have been a passing fad and manufacturers seeking profitable

opportunities were advised to turn their attention elsewhere.

Apparently, Nintendo didn't read (or heed) the report since they chose 1985 to introduce their home game system. Also, Accolade, Electronic Arts, Strategic Simulations, and other computer game companies started to release more games in the IBM PC format even though the PC was then considered to be primarily a "business" machine. These turned out to be wise decisions.

According to market surveys, Nintendo games were the most wanted Christmas presents three years in a row (1987-89). Two new game formats were introduced in 1990: 16-bit systems by Sega and computer/compact disc games by NEC, and the home video game market--far from being a fad--was healthy and growing again.

The steep and continuing decline in the prices of PC clones put them within reach of most home users thereby simplifying the life of game designers and manufacturers. No longer did manufacturers have to make a different game version for Apple, Atari, Commodore, and Tandy computers when a PC version would reach 90% of the users. Buoyed by a choice of new and innovative games, the market steadily rebounded from its 1985 trough.

Where to from here? It's anybody's guess. Obviously, new games will use the latest technology--laser discs, multi-channel sound, voice synthesis, speech recognition, and much more. Today, real-time flight simulation games almost exactly duplicate the situation faced by actual pilots. Tomorrow, we will be able to eliminate the word "almost."

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Photo Captions

Fig. 1. In Accolade's "Test Drive" game, players can choose to drive various cars on a variety of demanding tracks and courses.

Fig. 2. In "Yeager," a typical flight simulator, players must learn to land on a carrier deck, tough even for seasoned pilots.

Fig. 3. "Hardball," a realistic sports simulation provides realistic player animation, instant replays, complete player and team statistics, and five field perspectives.

Fig. 4. Computer versions of virtually every card and board game such as this version of Scrabble are available for one or more players.

Many ways of categorizing video games:

Michael Rubin in Defending the Galaxy:

Driving games (Turbo, Night Driver)
Bottom Movement games (Space Invaders, Centipede, Missile Command)
Free Flight games (Asteroids, Rip Off)
Maze games (Pac-Man, Berzerk, Venture)
Horizontal Offense/Defense (Stargate, Zaxxon)

(but then where do you put Qix, Frogger, Make Trax, Football, or Tron?)

Steve Bloom in Video Invaders:

Space Invaders-type games (shooter moves side to side)
Defender-type games (game motion horizontal)
Space Wars-type games (use vector graphics)
First-person games (player is inside a vehicle)
Pac-Man-type games (cartoon or "cutsey" games)
Climbing games (like Donkey Kong and Frogger)
Adventure games (Wizard of Wor, Venture, etc.)
Games that defy classification (Qix, Tempest)

Ken Uston in Buying and Beating the Home Video Games:

Hand-Eye Coordination (Asteroids, Space Invaders, Stargate)
Mental Challenge (Video Chess, Backgammon, Pac-Man)
Other (Adventure, Superman)

(too simplistic)

Other categorizations have similar problems:

Sports (can include games as diverse as Basketball, Grand Prix, and Skeet Shooting)
Military (Tank, Commando, and Missile Command would be in this category. but all are quite different)
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Timeline of Video and Computer Games and Related Technology

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1972 - NOV - ATARI PONG (10,000 + 90K KNOCK OFFS)		
1972 - NOV → (BLOOM - MAR '72)		
1973 ODYSSEY 100 (TENNIS, HOCKEY, SMASH) (SOLD 100K AT \$100) BY 1975, MAGNAVOX		
1974 NOV - ATARI: TANK		
1975 HOME PONG (BLOOM: 1973 - SOLD 100K) COST \$22M ON VIDEO GAMES		
1975 MIDWAY: GUN FIGHT } REVITALIZE INDUSTRY STALE ON PONG " SEA WOLF }		
1976 FAIRCHILD CHANNEL F APPROX. 60 DEDICATED GAMES AT CES - MOST USE GI 4438500 CHIPS		
1977 ← RCA (JUNG CES) → (DESIGN FINALIZED IN 1976) (ODYSSEY 2 BG 7514)		
1978 ATARI VCS #1 1979 ON		
BALLY ARCADE		
MIDWAY: SPACE INVADERS		
CINEMATRONICS: SPACE WARS #1 IN THE YR. USDO "VECTOR BEAM" VECTOR GRAPHICS		
1979		
1980 MATTEL (INTENVISION) #2 IN 1981		
MIDWAY: PAC-MAN		
COMPUTER	COIN-OP	HOME VIDEO
1957 TENNIS POOL 1962 POOL: SPACE WAR	1970 LUNAR LANDER 1971 1972 1973 1974 1975 1976 1977 1978 (APPLE: SPACE WAR)	1970 COMPUTER SPACE 1971 PONG 1972 TANK 1973 (MIDWAY) GUN FIGHT SEA WOLF 1974 SPACE INVADERS 1975 PAC-MAN
		1976 ODYSSEY 1977 PONG 1978 BREAKOUT ATARI VCS 1979 1980 ODY 200 300 4000 1981 ODYSSEY 2

1950		"COMPUTING MACHINERY + INTELLIGENCE" ALAN TURING	
1951	WHIRLWIND I USES CRT TO DISPLAY GRAPHIC AND ALPHANUMERIC OUTPUT - MIT	RADAR / MAP SIMULATIONS BOB CHAPMAN, ET AL RAND AIR DEFENSE LAS	152 HEX E.F. MOORE + SHANNON
1952		<u>VIDEO</u>	ALPHANUMERIC
1954	POOL	'53 CHECKERS ARTHUR SAMUEL IBM 701	154 BLACKJACK - IBM AEC LAB, LOS ALAMOS, NM 701
1956	UNIV. MICHIGAN	'53 "THE COMPLETE STRATEGIST" by J.D. WILLIAMS PUBLISHED RAND CORP	CHESS (MANIAC - I)
1958	TENNIS (ANALOG) HIGINBOTHEN	KISTER ET AL. LOS ALAMOS	
1960	'64? CRT COMBINES COMPUTER DATA WITH PROJECTED BACKGROUND FOR MILITARY GAMES BUNKER-RAMO (SCI AM 251) '64 COB 6600 SUPER COMPUTER 5/62 4 VIDEO DISPLAYS (BIT BY BIT 219) SLUG	BROOKHAVEN NAT'L LABS '61 SKETCHPAD (VAN SUTHERLAND) LINCOLN LABS (MIT) MIT	'55 HUTSPIEL - THEATER LEVEL WAR GAME NATO v USSR RESEARCH ANAL CORP., MCLEAN, VA
1962	POOL	RUSSELL, GRATZ, KOTOK SHAG, ALAN	'59 MANAGEMENT GAME (BENDIX G15) COHEN, CYERT, DIL, ET AL CARNEGIE-MELLON UNIV.
1965	STANFORD SAIL (HACKERS 133)	RCA	'61 FIRST TIME SHARING - MIT/IBM 709
1967			'67 ELIZA EDWARD WEISENBAUM, MIT
1967			'52 MILITARY SIMULATIONS GAMES
1971	11/11 INTEL 4004 8" FLOPPY DISK IBM	COMPUTER SPACE (COIN-OP) BUSHNELL NUTTING ASSOCIATES	'68 ROCKET CAR DISPLAY JUDAH SWARTZ MIT (SCI AM 61) '69 FLIGHT AIRCRAFT NAVAL TRAINING DEVICE CENTER
1972	'68 "GAME PLAYING WITH COMPUTERS" by DONALD SPENCER	PONG (COIN-OP) BUSHNELL ATARI	'65 EDUCATIONAL GAMES (BASIC) KEMENY & KURTZ GE-265? DARTMOUTH COLLEGE
		ODYSSEY (ANALOG, HOME) MAGNAVOX	'69 LUNAR LANDER (PDP-8) DIGITAL EQUIP. CORP
			'70 SCIENCE + SOCIAL SIMULATIONS (BASIC) BRAUN HUNTINGTON COMPUTER PROJECT, SUNY, STONY BROOK
			6/70 GAME OF LIFE JOHN CONWAY
			ADVENTURE (PDP-10) WILL CROTHER, DON WOODS STANFORD/XEROX
			10/72 "PEOPLE'S COMPUTER CO." BOS ALBRECHT, MENLO PARK, CA
1975	'73 INTEL 8008	6/75 PONG (HOME VERSION) ATARI	
		'77 TTS 80 MODEL I	

TECHNOLOGY

CIRCUITS

VACUUM TUBE

DISPLAYS

POINT PLOTTING

INTERNAL
STORAGE

CORE

TRANSISTORS

~~—~~ VECTOR/
CALIGRAPHIC

SOLID STATE

INTEGRATED
CIRCUITS

RASTER SCAN

~~—~~

VIDED GAMES

	COMPUTER	MAINFRAME	MINI	MICRO	SELF-CONTAINED	SPEC. PURPOSE	HOME TV
1954	<u>COIN-OP</u>						
1958					TENNIS HIGHBOTHEN (BROOKHAVEN)		
1962					MAY SPACEWAR (RUSSELL, M.I.T.)		
1966						TENNIS (BAER SAUNDERS)	
1967		POOL (RCA)					
1971	COMPUTER SPACE (BUSHNELL, NUTTING')						
1972	PONG (BUSHNELL, ATARI) TANK '74		LUNAR LANDER (D.E.C.)			ODYSSEY (MAGNAVOX)	
1975	1 SPACE INVADERS			KIT COMPUTERS		6/75 TELEGAME/PONG (SEARS/ATARI)	
1976	BREAKOUT LE MANS			ALTAIR (MSA1 SNTPC)		12/75 ODYSSEY 100,200 (MAGNAVOX)	
1977				(PROCESSOR TECHNOLOGY)			
				SELF-CONTAINED COMPUTERS		"PROGRAMMABLE" GAMES	
				APPLE II COMMODORE PET TRS-80 MODEL I		ATARI VCS	
1978				BREAKOUT (APPLE)		ODYSSEY 2	
1979	LUNAR LANDER ASTEROIDS			SPACEWARP (APPLE)		MATTEL INTELLIVISION	
				SPACE INVADERS (APPLE)		ACTIVISION	

1980

? LODE (AMIGA
(DOS 16)
? SPACEMAR
(APPLE)
POOL
(THORN/ATARI)

DEDICATED AND BALL
PADDLE GAMES DIE OUT

1981 CENTIPES

IBM PC

? PROGRAMMING
CARTRIDGES +
KEYBOARDS

1982

? VIC-20
SINCLAIR
SETHURU MICROCOMPUTERS
+ VIDEO GAMES

1983

1984

1985

1986

Up to 1977

Pong

Tank (battle)

Jet fighter

Anti-aircraft

Pursuit

Cops 'N Robbers

Gotcha (chase game in a maze)

Crossfire (conserve momentum)

Trak (driving)

Le Mans

Steeple Chase (horse race)

Stunt Cycle (motorcycle jumping)

Fly Ball (baseball)

Soccer

Jim x7953

Home

1970

1971

1972

1/21/72 built - introduced S/72
Magnavox Odyssey ~~17L200~~ (Sales thru 1975 - 340,000 units)
21,000 units (Datquest) Spent \$8 million on promo

1973 Odyssey 125-150K units

1

1974 Odyssey 125,000 units

1975 6/75 Odyssey 70K units
Atari Pong (Sears ~~3~~ Telegame)

11/75 Odyssey 100 - Tennis + Hockey

12/75 " 200 " " , Sm 25h

First Dimension
Executive Games

1976

1977 Atari VCS
Odyssey 2
Mattel Intellivision

1978

1979 Activision

1980

Volume low for HK producers (Electronics 9/80)
No interest in ball + paddle games
Trend toward programmable games
APF Imagination Machine

Taiwan producers
leaving market
Singapore out of
market

1981

1982

Computer

1962	Spacewar	Steve Russell
1958	Tennis	Willy Higginbotham
1967	Pool	RCA
1966	Tennis	Ralph Baer
1954	Pool	Univ of Michigan

TOTAL MARKET SIZE AND
SHARE OF PURCHASES (6-MO PERIODS)

Atari

Coleco

Mattel

Odyssey

2

Mar 1983

Purchased before 1982
" in 1982
" 1/83 - 6/83
7/83 - 12/83
1983

NFO
1/84 STUDY

NFO
7/84 STUDY

VIDEO GAMES OWNED

3510	Before '83	7599
5225	in '83	3231
1075	1/84-6/84	560
2760		
3878		
12943		11702

CATEGORIES OF GAMES

1971 72 73 74 75 76 77 78 79 80 81 82 83 84 85 86

~~Spacewar~~
SPACEWAR
ASTEROIDS SPACEWAR
COIN-OP MICRO
HOME TV

SPACEWAR
COIN-OP

BALL & PADDLE

PONG
COIN-OP
ODYSSEY

BREAKOUT
MICRO

BREAKOUT
HOME TV

?

MANEUVER & SHOOT

TANK

GUN FIGHT SEA WOLF COMBAT

CHASE IN MAZE

GOTCHA

PAC MAN

DIG DUG

DRIVING

TRAK LE MANS NIGHT DRIVER

HORSE RACE

STEEPLE CHASE

MOTORCYCLE

STUNT CYCLE

BASEBALL

FLY BALL

FOOTBALL

FOOTBALL

SOCCER

WORLD CUP SOCCER

FLYING

FLIGHT SIMULATOR

SHOOT FROM MOVABLE BASE

SPACE INVADERS CENTIPEDE GALAXIAN
MISSILE COMMAND

ROLE PLAYING

POOL

CATCH FALLING OBJECTS

FANTASY MAZE

QIX ZAXXON TEMPEST BATTLE ZANG DEFENDER

AVALANCHE

KABOOM

HOME TV